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# SPEECH OF MR. RAYNER, OF NORTH CAROLINA, ON THE QUESTION OF THE RECEPTION OF ABOLITION PETITIONS.

Delivered in the House of Representatives of the U. States, on Tuesday, June 15, 1841.

MR. RAYNER said he was aware he should be met with the same charge, from a certain quarter, which was made against his friend from Virginia, (Mr. WISE)—that his object was to produce agitation. But he took the distinct ground, in the outset of his remarks, that he, and those who were battling here for the rights of the South, were fighting strictly *on the defensive*. We are guilty of no aggression (said Mr. R.) We place ourselves under the protection of the Constitution. All we ask of you is, that the House may be organized according to the parliamentary practice—according to the usage which has existed here since the origin of the Government. We call upon you to adopt the rules of the last Congress, till new ones can be reported—that we may immediately proceed to the business for which we assembled. We know we did not meet here, for the purpose of blowing the embers of sectional strife. The patriotism and the intelligence of the nation demand something more at our hands. The eyes of a suffering country are upon us. I then call upon the members of the House, in the name of our common country, to organize the House in the usual way—to adopt the old rules, till a committee can have time to revise and report new ones. But no—the gentleman from Massachusetts, (Mr. ADAMS,) and those who sustain him, must first obtain a triumph over the unoffending South. The feelings of every Southern man must be outraged, before the first step is taken, towards accomplishing the great task for which we were convened. This is a question on which we will yield nothing. We will contest every inch of ground; and if we fall, we will fall fighting, with our faces to the foe. If evil come of it, we are not responsible. We have the vantage ground, of struggling for our rights—of acting on the defensive. You are the aggressors, and on your heads let the consequences fall.

I shall vote against every proposition (said Mr. R.) which recognises the *reception* of abolition petitions—which is to place them in the possession of this House—or which tends to confer upon them any consideration whatever. I shall vote against their reception, because I believe they ask us to violate the Constitution; because they are calculated to obstruct the regular course of business *here*—and to foster discord and disunion throughout this country. As the Constitution has given Congress no power to “take private property except for public use,” and then only on “just compensation,” I will not even *consider* a proposition, which asks us to take away the private property of the citizens of the District—not “for public use”—unless “public use” consists, in gratifying the whims of agitators in one section of the Union, at the expense of the rights, the interests, and the feelings of another section. Such legislation as these petitions ask for, would not be for public use, but for the gratification of private malice. I believe I am warranted in saying, that the South, with a unanimity unequalled on any other subject, believes, that the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia would, so far from being of “public use” to the whole Union, render that Union valueless to them. Not only because it would be violative of the Constitution, upon a rigid adherence to which, they believe their vital interests to depend; but because it would be opening a door for still further usurpations; because it would be effecting a breach in the walls of the Constitution, through which the citadel of liberty itself might hereafter be assailed. If our property, that which the Constitution recognises as our property, is to be taken from us, not for a public use, but to appease the demon of fanaticism, what assurance have we,

that our own civil rights will not next be invaded, and we ourselves be reduced to the condition of a colonial vassalage?

But even admitting that sophistry could distort the abolition of slavery, in the District of Columbia, into a "public use," how would you obtain the means of "compensation?" Would you tax the citizens of the District, to raise a fund, to pay them for what already belongs to them? This would not only be a mockery of justice, but an insult to their understandings. It would be an attempt to legalise fraud, and to cheat the Constitution, by doing indirectly, that which you cannot do directly. Would you tax the States for this purpose? It would only be effecting, by taxing us against our consent, that, which you can not do even with our consent—unless by destroying that compromise of the Constitution, by which all the great leading interests of the country are protected and sustained. By taxing us, to accomplish an object which must prove destructive to our interests, you inflict a *double* hardship upon us; you add insult to injury; you make us pay for the very lash which is to scourge us—for the very poison that is to work our destruction.

But admitting there were no injustice, in taxing the South to effect an object, which, without taxation, would be sowing the very seeds of ruin in our soil—still, you are met with another difficulty, as insurmountable as if there were a positive prohibition incorporated in the Constitution itself. I refer to the compact, entered into between the States, through their joint agents here, and the States of Virginia and Maryland, as contained in their deeds of cession. The deeds of cession from those States have expressly provided against any such emergency as this. The deed of cession from Virginia expressly declares, that "nothing therein contained shall be construed to vest in the United States any right of property in the soil, or to affect the rights of individuals therein, otherwise than may be transferred by such individuals to the United States." Now here is an express provision, granting to the inhabitants of this District, unimpaired, all the rights and title to property, which they had, when under the protection of the State governments. Will any one pretend to say that this stipulation is not binding, and that we, as the representatives of the States, are not bound, by all the solemnity of plighted faith, to see that the bond is strictly complied with? Here the States of Virginia and Maryland, for a certain consideration, agreed to relinquish all jurisdiction over the ceded territory, to the General Government. That consideration was, that the citizens of the District should not be molested in the possession of their property, or enjoyment of their rights; and will any one now pretend to say, that any false mawkish notion of benevolence can absolve this Government from its obligations? Why, sir, the obligation is as binding as the Constitution itself. The Constitution is only a contract, dependent for its observance, upon the plighted faith of those who formed it; where each of the States has pledged itself to all, and all to each, to the observance of certain stipulations, which are to form a basis of government. The deeds of cession from Virginia and Maryland are also a contract, where the other States have pledged their faith, to respect and protect the rights and property of the people of the District—which contract, we, as the representatives of those States, are bound by every consideration of honor, as well as duty, to observe. Why, it is to the magnanimity and patriotism of those States, that we are indebted for the very privilege of discussing this question *here*, for the very place of our legislation, for the very site of this fair and splendid edifice—and shall we requite their kindness and liberality, by erecting the very soil which they have given us, into a platform wherfrom to assail them? This would be playing the part of the serpent in the fable, which, when warmed, and restored to life at the hearth of the husbandman, repaid his kindness by striking his own child with its deadly fangs.

If there had been no guaranty on the part of the General Government, to protect the citizens of the District in the enjoyment of their property and their

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rights, still, it would be restrained by every consideration of honor and justice, from interfering with the institution of slavery here. For, who can for a moment believe, that Virginia and Maryland ever would have ceded their territory, if they could have supposed it was afterwards to become an arena for fanatics and incendiaries, from whence the fire brand of commotion could be hurled into their borders? Does any one suppose, that they ever would have ceded a spot, in the very heart of their territory, if they could have imagined it was afterwards to become the stronghold of the enemies of their institutions—whence their rights and their interests were to be daily assailed? No one can doubt upon the subject for a moment, after seeing the sensitiveness of the people of those States upon this question—their impatience, nay, their indignation, at the manner in which their liberality is attempted to be abused. Even in the absence of any express provision—the deep and vital interest which is felt upon the subject in those States, the watchful jealousy which they exercise over this matter, and the disastrous consequences resulting to those States, from any interference with the subject in this District—in connection with the absolute certainty, that those States never would have ceded this territory, had they supposed it possible that their liberality was ever to be so much abused—raise an *implied* stipulation on the part of this Government, that this question should not be disturbed by it.

If, then, the Constitution prohibits you from taking private property, except for public use, how can you rob the people of this District of their rights, merely to gratify the fiendish appetite of fanaticism? If your Government has entered into a solemn contract, for a valuable consideration, to protect these people in all the rights and privileges which they enjoyed under the ceding States, how can you take their property, without violating the plighted faith of the nation? If you are certain in your own mind—as you must be—that Virginia and Maryland never would have ceded this territory, had they supposed it possible that this Government ever would have taken a step so detrimental to their interests, how can you now impose upon their liberality, and abuse their confidence, without violating “every precept of morality, every sentiment of honor?

But gentlemen tell us, that by refusing to receive these petitions, we violate that right of petition, which is guaranteed in the Constitution to the citizens of this country. But I insist upon it, that the Constitution must be complied with, by the use of constitutional means. You have no right to violate the Constitution, under a pretence that it is necessary to the enjoyment of a constitutional privilege. The means must be commensurate with the end. The Constitution would be a dead letter, and its restrictions a mere mockery, if its provisions are to be violated, under the pretence that such violation is necessary to the enjoyment of a right claimed under it. If this construction of the Constitution is once adopted, there is no violation of its provisions, no matter how flagrant soever it may be, that sophistry and interest will not distort into a means indispensably necessary to the enjoyment of an admitted right. You thus destroy the safeguards of the Constitution, in a pretended zeal for their observance. Such a regard for the Constitution as this, is destructive of the very end and object proposed. It is like the embrace of a giant, that smothers in his grasp, the very object of his love.

The Constitution says, that the people have a right “peaceably to assemble and petition for a redress of grievances.” Here we see that the right to petition is not unlimited in its nature, but is restricted and confined to “a redress of grievances.” A redress of whose grievances?—their own grievances, or the grievances of others? It requires no proficiency in constitutional law to answer the question. Common sense must answer it. If it is for a redress of their own grievances, then they have no right to have considered, petitions which harrass this House session after session, obstructing the progress of public business, and sowing the seeds of tumult and confusion in

this hall—for a redress of what they would call the grievances of the slaves of this District—thereby endangering the existence of that very Constitution, under which they pretend to claim the right. It certainly cannot be, that the Constitution gives the right to petition for a redress of the grievances of others; if so, where is its benevolent operation to terminate? Is it limited to the grievances of the people of the United States, or of the western continent?—or of the civilized world? Once you pass the limit, within which common sense must confine the operation of this privilege, and there is no people, no matter however remote they may be, no grievance no matter howsoever imaginary, that is not a legitimate object of petition, and to which we are not bound to attend. If these people have a right to have considered, petitions asking for a redress, not of their own, but, of the grievances of others—then they have a right to petition us to declare war against Texas, on account of the toleration of slavery in that country—they have a right to petition us to interfere in dissolving the union between England and Ireland, on account of the grievances under which the people of the latter country may suffer. They have a right to petition us to make war against Russia or Austria, for permitting the landed proprietors in those countries, to retain in bondage, the thousands of wretched serfs, whose condition is ten times as bad as that of the slaves of the South. And if the right of petition means the right to have the petition considered, we should be bound to take the prayers of such petitions under our most serious consideration.

So you see to what absurdities the doctrine would lead us. Establish the principle, that any portion of the people of this country have a right to petition for redress, not of their own, but of the grievances of others—and if of others, of the whole world—and there is no subject, no matter how little connected with our constitutional duties—no matter how remote from the purposes of our election—petitions on which, we would not be compelled to receive, and it to receive, on which we would not be compelled to act. And thus might this House be kept not only in interminable confusion, but at an endless labor, merely to gratify the restless and importunate cravings of a band of fanatics.

The absurdity then, to which a different construction would lead us, proves, that the right of the citizen to have considered, a petition for the redress of grievances, must be qualified, by confining it to *his own*, and not the grievances of *others*. But sir, the right of petition for a redress of his own grievances, is not unlimited in its nature. It must be restricted to those grievances only which Congress has the constitutional power to redress, or rather, which it is not clearly forbid to redress. If the citizen claims a privilege, in pursuance of a provision in the constitution, that privilege must be exercised and enjoyed, by the use of constitutional means. The constitution certainly never intended to confer upon the citizen, the right to petition Congress to do that, which it has refused Congress the power to do. If so, we would be bound to receive petitions praying for the *abolition* of the Constitution itself—nay, sir, we would be bound to receive petitions praying for the destruction of our republican system, and the establishment of a kingly government. There is nothing so absurd, so abusive, so anti-republican soever it might be, that would not be a legitimate subject of petition, and the reception and consideration of which, would not be obligatory upon us. Suppose petitions were sent here, complaining of the excesses of democracy, as a grievance, and praying for the establishment of an order of nobility in this country, for the purpose of checking its violence—would you be bound to receive them? Suppose petitions were to come here from the South, denouncing the manufactories of the North, as public nuisances, complaining of the grievances of the laborers in those establishments, of the cruelty of their taskmasters, of the tyranny to which they are subjected—and praying Congress to pass a law, that if they were not all abandoned by a

given day, they should be abated as nuisances by the public officer, or confiscated to the public use—would gentlemen from the North vote for the reception of such petitions. Suppose petitions were to come here from the Roman Catholics, asking us to pass a law forbidding the use of meat on certain days; or from the Jews, asking us to prevent the toleration of the Christian religion, or from Fanny Wright and her followers, asking us to abolish the institution of marriage—would gentlemen who come from the land of steady habits, be so sensitive about the right of petition? Would they feel bound to receive them? and to treat them with respect? Would the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. ADAMS,) vote to receive such propositions?

Mr. ADAMS. One great objection to slavery is, that it does abolish marriage. Slavery tears husband from wife, parent from child. That is one of the grievances attending it. It destroys all the relations of life, and among them the ties of marriage. How have I seen it operate in this very district?

Mr. RAYNER. I yielded the floor to the gentleman, for an answer to my question, and not for an argument.

Mr. ADAMS. Then ask me no more questions. If I am to be stopped as soon as I begin to answer, let no more questions be asked me.

Mr. RAYNER. The gentleman has dodged the question, with his usual ability and sagacity. I suppose the gentleman from Massachusetts is opposed to nullification, and would consign to oblivion and disgrace, all who differ with him on that subject; because he would say, the tendency of nullification was to disunion. Would he receive petitions, asking for a dissolution of the union of these States? Would he feel bound to receive and refer petitions, praying for the establishment of a religion by law? Suppose petitions come here couched in language too vulgar and obscene for the ears of decency—suppose they teem with blasphemy against the God who overlooks and protects us; suppose they breathe of that sin and pollution, amid scenes of which I learn these abolition petitions have their origin—according to the doctrine insisted on, we can exercise no discretion, we are bound to receive them, and to bestow upon them our most gracious consideration. Suppose we are petitioned to dissolve the Union, why we must immediately set about and calculate its value. According to this construction of the Constitution, it contains within itself the elements of its own destruction. It has provided the very means by which it may be cautiously approached, successfully assailed, and inevitably destroyed. These agitators pretend, that it is a sacred regard for the rights secured by the Constitution, that actuates them; yet in the excess of their devotion, in the fervour of their affection for the Constitution, they stab it to the heart, as Joab did Abner, when pretending to embrace it. Why sir, it is ridiculous, it is absurd, to talk about the constitution imposing on Congress, the duty to do that, which must inevitably work a destruction of the Constitution itself.

I presume the House has the power, if it thought proper in its discretion to do so, to receive petitioners themselves at the bar of the House, and hear their grievances verbally explained. Well, are petitions drawn out on paper, and subscribed by the petitioners, entitled to more respect, or more binding in their obligation on us to receive them, than if the petitioners were to present themselves here in person? Certainly not—and who will deny, that the house in the latter case, would have power, and be fully justified, in driving the petitioners from our doors, if they addressed us in abusive or disrespectful language? And the house would, and must of necessity, be the judge, in its discretion, whether the petitioners demeaned themselves in a becoming manner, or not. This power must result from the inherent and necessary right of every legislative body to protect itself, and preserve its own dignity, in the exercise of its legal functions. Then, if the House would have the right to drive from its doors for improper conduct, or disrespectful language, or an attempt to disturb the order and harmony of the House and the Union, the petitioners

themselves ; it *must* have the right to refuse to receive their petitions for like cause ; unless pen, ink, and paper, can impart a sanctity to petition, which it does not possess when orally made. This House must have the power to protect itself from outrage and insult ; in doing so, it must exercise its own discretion ; and in the exercise of this discretion, a sound and enlightened public opinion will always secure for petitions that are respectful, and within the limits of our constitutional power, a calm and dispassionate consideration. And this point being yielded—that Congress must have the power to protect itself from insult and abuse, of which it can be the only judge, in its discretion—and every thing is yielded ; and all the sophistical arguments that are built upon the assumption, that Congress is bound to regard the right of petition without any qualification, must tumble to the ground. For all the strenuous advocates of the doctrine, that we are *bound* to receive and refer those petitions, are compelled to take the ground, that the right of petition is sacred, inviolable, and obligatory in its nature, and that it leaves Congress no discretion on the subject ; and that we are bound, without regard to the subject matter, or the language in which they are couched, to receive all petitions, respectfully refer and report upon them, even to the neglect of other pressing and important business of the nation.

But gentlemen tell us, it is the sacred right of petition these people are contending for. Very good, sir, no one denies them the right of petition. Insulting and vexatious though it be to us, still we do not deny them the right to assemble together ; to interchange their views ; to listen to the hypocritical rant, and rhapsodical appeals of their priestly impostors ; to shed as many crocodile tears as they please, over the imaginary wrongs of the poor slaves of the South, that are far happier than the thousands of starving wretches who need their charity at home ; we are willing that they should abuse us of the South, as tyrants, and deserving of massacre, as much as they choose ; we are willing to all this ; but we are not willing that their vile petitions, which ask us to violate the Constitution, and to put in jeopardy the peace and happiness of the people of this country, should receive any countenance from this body, the members of which are sworn to support the Constitution, and who ought to be the guardians of the rights and liberties of the people of the States. We insist upon it, that the petitions should be treated in the same way, the petitioners themselves would deserve to be treated, if they were to present themselves in person, disturbing our harmony and interrupting our proceedings—that our doors should be shut against them, and they driven with indignation from our presence. When petitions are presented here, that are respectful in their language, praying for a redress of the grievances of those who petition, and which relate to a subject within our constitutional jurisdiction ; the spirit of our free institutions requires, that we should, in the exercise of that sound discretion, which this body must possess for its own preservation, receive them, and respectfully consider them. But when they are violent in their tone, disrespectful and abusive to a large portion of the people of this country, praying for a redress not of their own real grievances, but the imaginary grievances of others ; when they ask us to throw the country into disorder and commotion, and to violate the Constitution which is the very soul of the Union ; so far from being received, they should be rejected with scorn and contempt.

But, sir, what is the right of petition, in the constitutional meaning of the term ? Is it the right of the people to *assemble together* without molestation, and to *express their wishes* to the Legislature ; or is it the right to have their petitions unqualifiedly and unconditionally *received, referred, and acted on* ? It certainly cannot mean the latter, for the same process of reasoning, that would establish it as the duty of Congress, to *receive* all petitions that are presented, of whatsoever character, would also prove it to be their bounden duty

to grant the prayers of the petitioners, when received. Because the duty of Congress to receive them, is an inference only, to be drawn from a latitude of construction; and the same latitude of construction, by going a step farther, could as easily prove, that the power petitioned is bound to grant the applicant's prayer. If the right of petition means any thing more than the right to assemble—to subscribe, if you please, and offer the petition—how much more *does* it mean, and what, and where, is the rule by which you apply its meaning? Do you derive your rule of construction from the Constitution, or from the law? If so, where is it? If the right of petition does not necessarily include the right to have the petition granted, what is the difference between rejecting it at the threshold, on account of its unconstitutionality and tendency to disunion, and doing so afterwards, on account of its inexpediency? If it *does* include the right to have the petition granted, why then there is an end to the Government, for there is no act of legislation, to which some factious spirit would not object, and thus the action of this House might ever be kept suspended, between petition on the one hand, and counter petition on the other. Sir, I again ask, what is the right of petition as provided for in the Constitution? If my recollection of history is correct, it grew out of, and is intended to guard against, the dangers and difficulties, which beset the friends of liberty, during their struggles against the despotism of the latter Stuarts. It is well known, that the peaceable assemblages of the opponents of power in those times, were frequently annoyed and dispersed by military force, under the pretence, that they were collected for treasonable and seditious purposes. And this right of assembling to consult together, for the purpose of laying their complaints before Parliament, was one of the great privileges contended for, and recognised in the bill of rights, signed by the 3d William, when he was called to the English throne in 1688. This right of petition, so much talked of, is seened to the English citizen as well as to ours; yet who will contend that Parliament would be bound to receive, refer, and consider, a petition, praying for the expulsion of the house of Brunswick, and the restoration of the Stuarts? Does any one here believe, that such a petition would receive countenance from the Commons of England? So far from it, it would place in peril the petitioner's head.

This right of petition, secured to the people of England by the bill of rights, was claimed and exercised before the Revolution, by these colonies, as a component part of the British realm. And the grounds upon which its violation was complained of, during the early struggles of the colonies against the tyranny of the mother country, was, not that their petitions were not received, but that "large bodies of armed troops were quartered among them," for the purpose of overawing their deliberations, and of interrupting their peaceful assemblages, when quietly convened, for the purpose of consulting for their common good. This is one of the grievances set forth in the Declaration of Independence, a protection against which was afterwards incorporated in our fundamental law. Judging, then, from the history of this question, and the probable motives which caused its insertion in the Constitution, it has reference to the *acts* and *personal security* of the petitioners—their right to assemble together, to consult for their common good—to send on their petitions for *presentation*, if you please, and not to any obligation on the part of the petitioned to *grant*, or to *receive*, the prayers of the applicants. As to the course of action on the part of the Legislature, it must be regulated by sound discretion, by a prudent policy, by an enlightened public opinion, and by the provisions of the Constitution, in regard to the subject-matter of the petitions. For if there is an unlimited and unqualified obligation on the part of Congress, to receive and consider all petitions, then we would be bound to receive and respectfully entertain, petitions praying us to abolish the Constitution, and to return once more under the colonial dominion of England. Gentlemen may

•ay, this is an extreme case. I know it is—but still, this is a lawful and practicable method of argument, and is well calculated to expose the absurdity of the principle contended for.

I believe the power of Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, is usually claimed under that clause which says that Congress shall have power “to exercise exclusive legislation, in all cases whatsoever, over such district (not exceeding ten miles square) as may, by cession of particular States, and the acceptance of Congress, become the seat of the Government of the United States,” &c. I believe the abolitionists admit—I know I have heard the gentleman from Vermont, (Mr. Slade,) admit it—that if the power is not derived from the grant of “*exclusive legislation*,” then slavery in the district is not a grievance, for a redress of which, the people of the north have a right to petition. Now, what is the meaning of *exclusive legislation*? Does it mean absolute and unlimited legislation? Certainly not. The word *exclusive* is an *adjective* part of speech, and in *expressing the quality of the substantive* to which it is applied, it has a negative relation to other or different influence, than that of the preceding power to which it refers. *Exclusive*, in its derivative sense, means the *shutting out*, or *casting off* of any other. It is intended to denote the *quality*, and not the *quantity*, or *amount*, of legislation to which it may relate. And the *quality* which it denotes, is, that it *shuts out* all legislation by any other power. Webster, in his dictionary, defines *exclusive* as meaning—“having the power of preventing entrance—debaring from participation—possessed and enjoyed to the exclusion of others.” The Legislature of North Carolina has exclusive legislation over all the territory included within the limits of that State, except so far as it has granted it to this Government; and yet that Legislature has not the power to abolish slavery in that State, because slavery is an institution recognized by her constitution, in the apportionment of her representation, in the imposition of taxation, and in the right of property which it guarantees to the citizen. The master in the south has the exclusive right of property in his slave; still he has not unlimited power over him, as had the ancient Romans over their slaves. He cannot put him to death; and, in my State, he is compelled, by statute, to clothe him, to feed him, and to treat him humanely. The Constitution has left to the State Legislatures the exclusive right of choosing their Senators in Congress: still they have not an unlimited and absolute control of the matter—they must select them from within the State for which they are chosen; and cannot select persons under thirty years of age. The company of the Washington and Baltimore rail-road have the exclusive right of transportation on that road; yet they have not the absolute and unlimited power to transport the person or property of any man against his will; neither have they the right to wantonly run their engines over any luckless traveller, who may happen to straggle across their track. And so the “*exclusive legislation*” mentioned in the Constitution, while it excludes legislation by any *other* power, still does not grant to Congress an absolute and unlimited control over those subjects, on which it is authorized to legislate. If *exclusive legislation* means unlimited legislation, then Congress has power to establish a censorship of the press for this district, or to establish therein a religion by law.

I have frequently heard it said, that this matter would not have been left so vague and indefinite, if Virginia and Maryland had intended to restrict the General Government in its legislative action; but that they would have inserted a provision, that would have placed the question beyond doubt. I have already attempted to show, that this case was fully provided for in the deeds of cession, and that the restriction is entire and complete. But, if there had been no express restriction, it would not have altered the case. No one believes that either of those States would ever have

ceded the territory in question, could they have supposed the General Government would ever so far violate every principle of faith and justice, as to convert this district into an asylum and a refuge for their runaway slaves. The cession, however, was made in the purer days of the republic, when its destinies were controlled by the same men who achieved its liberties, and the noble impulses of freedom and patriotism beat high and bounding in their bosoms. Those States could not then have supposed, that, in fifty years, faction and fanaticism was to shake this Union to its centre; and that a boon, which they bestowed from the purest motives of patriotism, was to be used as a means of their destruction. Amid the warmth of those generous impulses that excited to the deed, it is not to be supposed, that they should have been as exacting as Shylock, or as accurate as a miser when counting his gold. If no provision of restriction had been inserted, the General Government could not have exercised the power, without being guilty of an act of perfidy, disgraceful to the Government, and disreputable to the American character. It is cruel, at all times, to deceive the credulous and unwary, even when no fatal injury is to be the result; but to take advantage of confidence reposed, to plot disaster and ruin against the innocent and confiding party, is crime unpardonable, and when committed by a nation, is "a reproach to any people." Yes, sir, in the absence of any provision, if this Government were to violate the faith reposed in it by Virginia and Maryland, then American faith might well become a bye-word and a reproach, in modern times—as Punic faith was among the ancients, to denote the perfidy and insincerity of the Carthaginian character.

I presume no one will deny, that the abolition of slavery in this District, by this Government, would be an act of perfidy towards Maryland and Virginia, who ceded the territory. And will gentlemen yet insist, that we should receive and consider petitions, which call upon us to commit a gross and wilful act of perfidy? Now I presume it is unnecessary for me to undertake to prove, that a proposition to commit an act of perfidy, ought not to be entertained in this House. If an honest and conscientious man in private life, would reject such a proposition with scorn and indignation, ought not the assembled representatives of a Christian people to do it? Perfidy, which is a violation of confidence, of trust reposed, is a crime which, in all ages of the world, has been stamped with the deepest reprobation; and which untutored savages even look upon with horror. The wild Arab of the desert, who roams in quest of plunder, and whose mind has never been illuminated by the beams of Christian light, not only observes his promise with scrupulous fidelity, but looks upon the way-worn traveller who enters his tent, as inviolable in his purse and person; and would risk his life, in defence of the guest who relies upon an *implied* assurance of his protection. And shall it be said that a Christian people, who boast of their civilization, and of their regard for all the obligations of morality and justice, are guilty of an act of perfidy, which would bring the blush of shame to an Arab's cheek? Will this Government legalize treachery? will it knowingly and wilfully violate the confidence which has been reposed in it? Gentlemen who favor the views of the fanatics, talk a great deal about moral right and justice. Here is a case, which affords them an opportunity of showing their sense of moral right. For there is a great moral principle involved in this issue; it is whether plighted faith is hereafter to be regarded among men, or whether it is to be treated as a jest. It is, whether confidence is hereafter to be observed, or doubt and suspicion to prevail in its stead. Why, sir, what sort of a spectacle would the human family present, if all confidence were destroyed between man and man? Banish confidence from the world, and you produce a social chaos. Governments exist by confidence, society is held together by no other tie—and all the tender

and endearing relations of life, would lose their charm without it. Destroy confidence, and then indeed, is friendship

—“but a name,  
A charm that lulls to sleep,”

and a still more tender relation yields its power to

“The green-eyed monster, which doth mock  
The meat it feeds on.”

Establish the principle, that plighted faith is not to be regarded, and you convert man, from a social being, into a gloomy misanthrope. Destroy confidence between nations, and intercourse must be suspended; and where commerce now spreads her canvass to the breeze, solitude will brood over the bosom of the deep. Destroy confidence, and you dissolve the cement that binds this Union together; you convert this building from a legislative hall into a castle of defence; and where our stars and stripes now wave in the breeze, armed sentinels will soon keep watch.

Mr. Speaker, I had intended to attempt to show, that the interference of Congress, with the sale of slaves between the States; the abolition of slavery in the Territories; or the prohibition of slavery in the new States to be admitted into the Union, would be equally unconstitutional, and violative of good faith, as the interference of slavery in this District; but having occupied the time of the House so long, I cannot now go into either of those questions.

The gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. ADAMS) remarked, in quoting the language of another, that there was not one of the attributes of the Almighty, on the side of those who tolerate slavery, or who would attempt to quell a servile insurrection by force. Here the gentleman has chosen to forget the Constitution and the law, and to place this question upon the great principles of moral right and of the Divine law. I will not stop to look at the direful consequences, growing out of the loose application of such a doctrine as this, to the affairs of human legislation. It sweeps away, in a moment, all the restraints of law and order; and subjects all social compacts, all conventional agreements, all legislative enactments, to the capricious and factious construction, which a blind and infuriated multitude might place, upon the principles and requirements of the moral law. It is disorganizing, it is revolutionary—and lets loose upon the world, all the tumultuous impulses of human passion. So far as relates to human government and to temporal institutions, *these* must be a matter of conventional arrangement—of plighted faith. As to the abstract and inherent behests of the Divine law, *they* rest only in the bosom of that great Being who governs the world—and He, in his appointed time, will mete out justice in due proportion, to the offender and the offended. And will the gentleman from Massachusetts and his abolition friends, presume to assert one of the attributes of Deity itself? Will they undertake to avenge, what they call in their fanatical jargon, the accumulated wrongs of an injured race? How dare they be guilty of such impious presumption? “Vengeance is mine saith the Lord,” says that book which we are all taught to reverence. In their wild rant about *justice*, they should recollect that injunction of the decalogue, which says, “thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s man servant, nor his maid servant, nor any thing that is his.” We also demand nothing but justice. We claim to be let alone—to be left free to the enjoyment of those rights, that are guaranteed to us by the Constitution of our country; and as to any violation of justice, or of the moral law, we are responsible to that Being, before whom we must all appear in judgment.

The gentleman from Massachusetts told us, that this movement on the part of the abolitionists, was in accordance with that progress of public opinion which is pervading the world. He referred to the emancipation of the slaves in the West Indies, and to the gradual progress of mental improvement even

in China itself. I was really surprised to hear a man of his reach and power of understanding, advance an argument on this subject, which a pigmy in intellect can overturn in a moment. What, does he put the power of this House, on a level with the power of the British Parliament? Has he quite forgotten the Constitution? Does he not know that our powers are limited, while those of Parliament are said to be omnipotent? If the Governments of England and France have seen fit to abolish slavery in their dominions, they had an unlimited right to do so; but I have never yet heard of that nation, which has ever advanced the claim to interfere with this institution, on the soil, and within the jurisdiction, of another country. The gentleman from Massachusetts spoke, with much apparent pride, of the emancipation by England of the slaves in her West India possessions. If he is willing to know the workings of this system, I refer him to an article in the Edinburgh Review\* for January, 1841, entitled "Wrongs and Claims of Indian Commerce," from which it will be seen, that the present degraded and unhappy condition of the emancipated slaves there, needs his sympathy much more than do the slaves of our Southern States. If slavery be an evil, the remedy must be left to ourselves; and we need not the mawkish sensibility of those who are unacquainted with our situation, to teach us our duty or our interest.

This attempt to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, is false and deceptive in its character; for it cannot be concealed, that the object is to gain a foothold, wherefrom to assail slavery more effectually in the States. I know this was for a long time denied; in fact, at the commencement of this agitation, we were told that they did not contemplate any legislative action whatever; but that their only object, was to exercise a moral influence upon public opinion. But they have changed their position. My friend from Georgia (Mr. KING,) who, the other day, threw himself so gallantly in the

\* "This misunderstanding [between the managers and laborers]—though the term is too mild inadequately to represent the existing relation of the parties,—has arisen from the unwise endeavor of the planters to compel labor, by the exercise of a species of coercion futile for every purpose but annoyance and exasperation. It has been attempted to make the dwellings at provision grounds of the negroes, the instruments of compelling them to work for the land owner on whose plantation they reside, or of reducing their wages. The language used has been, 'if you will not work for me, you must quit immediately your house and land,' (to the latter of which the labor of the tenant has given its principal value;) 'if you demand so much a week for wages, I demand so much for rent, or rather so much for each member of your family, without reference to the actual value of the tenement and its appurtenances; and the one I demand, the other shall be simultaneously adjusted.' The strong arm of the law has been liberally invoked, to carry on the contest commenced on such grounds: legislation has not been sparing to render it stronger. The planters being the makers, in some instances the administrators of the laws, equipments of the most heterogeneous description have been brought to bear upon the unfortunate laborers. There are the contract act, the poundage act, the fishery act, the huckster and pedlar act, the petty debt act, the police act, and the vagrant act, all of which (except the first, which he does not mention) Mr. Gurney designates as 'local laws opposed to the true intent and purpose of the act of emancipation.' 'The petty debt act,' he says, affords tremendous facilities to that oppressive system of penal and fictitious rents, which is now the very bane of Jamaica. A police, armed with deadly weapons, is always, to say the least of it, a dangerous expedient; and in country districts where there is confessedly scarcely any crime, it can be regarded only as a needless source of irritation and alarm. Too soon may it also become an instrument of oppression and cruelty. Finally, in a country where there is scarcely to be found an instance of real vagabondism, but where laborers are often compelled to leave their homes in search of new locations, one cannot but be alarmed at the tendency of a law, which subjects every poor fellow who may be found sleeping under a hedge, or in an out-house by the road-side, to a long term of imprisonment, with hard labor in a penal gang." In other cases, still rougher measures have been taken to coerce labor or to revenge its being withheld;—cocoa-nut and bread-fruit trees have been felled; cottages have been unrooted, and sometimes demolished; pigs have been shot; provision grounds have been destroyed; the pleasant fruit of God's earth uprooted by the rude hand of violence, or trodden under feet by oxen."

breach, has proven from the record, from their own published documents, that the object of these agitators, is *general* abolition. And if it is to be commenced by legislation, will it not be continued, and consummated by legislation? Then I not only appeal to Southern men, but to Northern men, and I ask them, if they will entertain a proposition, which carries deception and falsehood upon its very face; and which is only intended as an entering wedge to the attainment of an object, which no man here will *now* have the hardihood to advocate. Disguise it as they may, it is a covert and base design, to abolish by legislation, the institution of slavery throughout the entire South. We all know the insidious progress of power, whether veiled under the forms of legislation, or exercised by the absolute will of one man. Its approach at first is slow and cautious; but it gains strength at each successive step; till finally it “bestrides us like a mighty Colossus;” and when it is too late, we must either appeal to the *ultima ratio* of revolution, or “find for ourselves dishonorable graves.” Now, now, is the time to arrest this evil; we must resist it in the outset; we must cut out this incipient cancer by the root. We must not only cut off the head of this Hydra, but like Hercules, we must apply the searing iron, to prevent its return with still more horrid features.

Sir, I will not attempt to discuss the isolated question of slavery, as it exists in the States; or attempt to prove on this floor, our right to our own property. All we have to say on this subject is, if you want our slaves, “come and take them.” But before you enter upon this mad crusade, I would advise you to count well the cost of your undertaking. Before you accomplish your purpose, you must march over hecatombs of bodies; you must convert every one of our smiling fields into a camp; you must beat every one of your ploughshares into swords. Long, long, before you reach the banks of the Roanoke, every stream will run red with your blood, every hill will whiten with your bones. Attempt this wild project, when you will, and if there be any truth in Heathen story, the banks of the Styx will be lined with your shivering ghosts, for a hundred years to come. And the battle will not be fought by the descendants of the Cavaliers alone, as intimated by the gentleman from Kentucky, (Mr. MARSHALL;) when your myrmidons, after conquering them, shall reach the borders of the Old North State, they will find the brawny sons of the mountains, and the quiet citizens of the plains, congregated on our northern border; we will there form a rampart with our bodies, over which you will never pass, till you have planted your feet upon our graves. I say not this in idle bravado—we shall never leave our homes to make war upon you—but I warn you to leave us unmolested, to let us alone. You know nothing, sir, you know nothing, of the feelings of our people, determined to maintain their rights by their own fire-sides, at the sacrifice of every comfort, at the risk of every danger.

So far as regards the mere question of slavery in the abstract, I am not one of those who believe it to be a blessing. I believe it to be an evil. And when I say an evil, I do not mean that its toleration is a crime, a political sin; but that it is a misfortune to any people, among whom it exists. But if it were ten times greater an evil than it is, we will never suffer those who are uninterested in the matter, to interfere with us. There is a natural repugnance in man, against the idle and insolent interference of others; and we never will be driven to do that, which, in process of time, we might have done from policy, and from interest. And I can assure Northern gentlemen, that the course of the abolitionists has riveted the chains of slavery, with double and triple bolts of steel. It has thrown back the cause of non-slavery in the South, at least a century. Since the people of the North have taken this matter in *their* keeping, we no longer contemplate the time in advance, when slavery is to cease amongst us. We had rather bear this evil, than that our enemies should claim as a triumph, that which future policy might have dictated to us to do of our own accord.

We are told by gentlemen from the North—and I am sorry to see a gentleman from the South (Mr. BORRIS of Virginia) has taken the same ground, in a card lately addressed to his constituents—that if we wish peace and quiet on this subject, we must receive and entertain these petitions. Then we must purchase peace, by what we conceive to be a surrender of our rights. Can we be expected to remain tame under such an alternative as this? Are gentlemen surprised at our excitement and impatience, at being thus harrassed? Do they insist, that we must not only submit to an invasion of our rights, but that we must not be allowed to complain? As well might you blame the victim at the stake for his cries, or the worm for turning, when it is trodden upon. The discussion, on our part, is of a defensive character—we want no discussion—we call for no action—but we simply ask to be let alone. We are blamed for the tone of defiance and temper, with which we speak on the subject. Gentlemen insist—and I am sorry to see that some from the South take that view of the matter—that we should refer and report upon these petitions; and reason with the agitators, upon the impropriety of granting their requests. For one, I cannot consent to do it. I put in a plea to the jurisdiction of the court. You have no power over the subject. And as to reason—what, reason with fanatics? Attempt to discuss calmly, a question, with those, who are under the influence of prejudice and passion? You might as well attempt to reason with a madman, upon the cause of his malady; or with a lover upon the folly of despondency. Such a tenacious grasp has fanaticism upon the mind, that of all passions, it is the most difficult to shake from its hold. It is the only influence, under which the human heart *may* not distrust itself. The poet beautifully expresses this idea, when he says:

“the lover may  
Distrust the look which steals his soul away ;—  
The babe may cease to think that it can play  
With heaven’s rainbow ;—alchymists may doubt  
The shining gold their crucible gives out ;  
*But Faith, fanatic Faith, once wedded fast*  
*To some dear falsehood, hugs it to the last.*”

And so with these abolitionists—they are wedded fast to a falsehood, from which reason can never divorce them. We are frequently told, that these abolitionists, though deluded, are a respectable class, and conscientious in their views. Gentlemen may think so, but I doubt it. If their efforts proceed from a feeling of benevolence, and their real object is reform—if they are following the dictates of duty, why do they not go themselves in the South, and preach their doctrines in person—like true and faithful missionaries should do? If they were really sincere and conscientious in their course, they would not, like dastardly cowards, assail us from their retreats; but they would preach their doctrines to a deluded people (as they are pleased to call us) even at the risk of martyrdom itself. The assurance of truth and the consciousness of innocence always embolden the advocates of reform; and “the righteous are always as bold as a lion.” Why do they not come amongst us in the South? Perhaps they may convert us over to their opinion. Are they afraid that if they come, their foot-prints will all tend in one direction, like those of the beasts, to the sick lion’s den? The fear of that did not intimidate the apostles of our holy religion—it did not frighten the great reformer of our church, to whom this fanatic banditti are frequently compared—and to whom I have heard the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SLADE) compare them. The apostles, instead of annoying the Senate of Rome with their petitions, hoisted the banner of the cross, and preached the gospel of the Saviour in every land, unterrified and undismayed. The great apostle of the Gentiles carried his doctrines to the city of the Caesars, even when he knew that martyrdom awaited him. What was the reply of Luther,

when warned of the danger of going to the Diet at Worms? Said he, "if there were as many devils there as there are tiles on the roofs of its houses, I would go on." Tell me not of the sincerity, the valor, or the patriotism of these incendiaries. If they possess those qualities in the degree that has been attributed to them, they would *risk* something for the promulgation of their doctrines. As they have assailed our institutions, it is their duty to come and teach us our error. Why do they not come, I ask, and attack our crimes and our errors, fairly and openly in the field of argument—instead of skulking, like Seminoles, attacking us from the everglades and the thickets? Now, I do hope that gentlemen here, who approve of their course, will persuade some of them, to take pity on the poor deluded people of the South, to come amongst us, and enlighten us on this question. I advise the gentleman from Massachusetts, (Mr. ADAMS)—from Vermont, (Mr. SLADE) from Ohio, (Mr. GIDDINGS)—from New York, (Mr. GATES)—and the old gentleman over the way (Mr. MATTOCKS,) who talked the other day about the damning sin of slavery—I advise them, when they return home, to persuade some of the leaders of abolitionism in their districts, to take pity on our ignorance in the South, to come and teach the people of *my* district, what a great curse slavery is. They will gain one point at least, by coming. They will convince us of their sincerity. And although I cannot answer for the number of converts they may make—yet, I will promise them one thing—they shall be treated with the *highest* consideration.

Sir, there is another consideration connected with this subject, which is not only disreputable to the country, but a reproach to the age; and denotes a vitiated state of moral feeling, that threatens to revolutionize society itself. It is, that this crusade against the institutions of the South, is, in a great degree, carried on and sustained by men professing to be the ministers of the gospel of Christ, and by—I almost blush to say it—women. I believe it was the orator of Roanoke, who once said that the worst government on earth was a government of priests, and the next worst, was a government of women. And if the movement which is now going on succeeds, we are in danger of having a government of priests and women combined. I am the last man in the world, to say any thing disrespectful of the *true* ministers of that holy religion, that was taught by the Saviour of the world. And nothing but an assurance, that these men are believing their religious professions, could induce me to speak of them with the freedom which I do. I make no pretensions to piety—yet, from my youth upward, I have always entertained a profound reverence for that holy religion, the truth of which was sealed with the blood of God himself. And, sir, I had always thought, that the tendency of this religion was to expand and elevate the soul—to lift its aspirations far above the perishing objects of time and sense—to point the eye of faith to Heaven—and to administer the consolation, of a well spent and inoffensive life, in the hour of death. And is this bright vision of my youth to be dispelled—"to fly like fancy's dream," before the sad realities of the times? No, it cannot be—it must not be. These men are believing their sacred professions; they profess to be the followers of Him who said his kingdom was not of this world; and yet they are mingling in the turmoil, and fanning the fires, of political strife. They know not—and I suppose they care not—how much they are injuring the cause of religion, by violating its injunctions, while pretending to be actuated by a zeal for its success.

Those who know me well, know that I am incapable of any disrespect to the fairer portion of creation. No man bows with more sincere devotion to the power and majesty of woman. And it is my great regard, my inexpressible veneration, for the female character, my elevated conception of its dignity and its worth—that cause me to look with such utter abhorrence upon the conduct

of the female portion of abolition petitioners here. At least half of the signers to these petitions, breathing venom and denunciation against the entire South, are women. Sir, women have no business interfering where men are contending for empire. They are as unfit to teach us our political duties, as they are to lead our armies in war, or to conduct our councils in peace. The scenes here are too exciting, the conflicts too bitter, for their tender and delicate natures. Their business is to soothe the impetuous and hardened nature of man, instead of exciting it into still more violent commotion. Their empire is decidedly one of the heart—

“Wherever a tear is dried, a wounded heart  
Bound up, a bruised spirit with the dew  
Of sympathy anointed, or a pang  
Of honest suffering soothed.”

there is woman's sphere, there is the proper theatre for her action. But when they will unsex themselves, by thrusting themselves into scenes for which nature never intended them ; they must expect their conduct to undergo the ordeal of criticism—for a reprobation of their course is a duty which we owe to others of their sex, whose modesty and sense of propriety restrain them within their own sphere. It always denotes a distempered state of moral feeling, to see women busily interfering in the political affairs of a nation. English history reads us many lessons on this subject. The plans and intrigues that led to the elevation of Cromwell, the most finished hypocrite of modern history were originated and matured at the *pretended* meetings for prayer, in which the women of the time not only participated, but exercised an important influence. What sort of an administration had England in the reign of Charles II, when ministers even, held seals to-day, and were expelled from office to-morrow, as one favorite or another happened to predominate in the Sovereign's affections. The revolution in France, was hurried in its progress by the fish-women of Paris ; and many of the horrors of that bloody time, were perpetrated by female hands. And all the hypocritical cant of the days of Cromwell—all the disgusting intrigue of the court of Charles II—all the horrid excesses of the French revolution—proceeded not from a more fiendish spirit, than that which hurries on, in their course, the abolitionists of the present day ; for they are not only regardless of the human suffering which may result from their course ; but the inevitable tendency of their measures, is to overthrow the Government itself, and thereby extinguish forever, the hopes of freedom throughout the world.

Now, sir, I think the time has arrived when the North and the South should understand each other on this question. I wish the South to know who are the friends, and who the enemies of their constitutional rights. The gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. ADAMS) has said this is the great question—that it is a question between the North and the South—between liberty and slavery. He has said that the adoption of the 21st rule at the last session, was a then administration measure—and spoke with apparent pride, of the abrogation of this rule, being the first measure of the Whig administration. And this speech of his will be printed and sent abroad to the world, as having received the tacit sanction of the members from the North. Are Northern gentlemen willing to endorse this proposition ? If they are not, why have they not disclaimed it ? Now, if the gentleman from Massachusetts is right, and the reception of abolition petitions is the great question which supersedes all others—if Northern gentlemen are to annoy us eternally on this subject—if all political and party differences are to be merged in one great issue of sectional feeling—the sooner we know it the better. For no matter what political differences may have existed among us heretofore, yet, my word for it, on this question the South will stand firm as one man—not for the purpose of offence—not for the purpose of aggression—but for the purpose of

defending ourselves, against a lawless and insolent interference with our rights. And according to the position of the gentleman from Massachusetts, we are bound to consider the rescinding of this rule at this time—if not as a direct attack upon us—as a tacit sanction of the mad measures of those, who have for years, been endeavoring to light the torch of the incendiary for our dwellings, and to sharpen the knife of the assassin for our throats.

We know no party differences at the South on this subject. And if any portion or party in the North attempt to deprive us of our rights, be they Whigs or be they Democrats, we shall regard them as our enemies, and deal with them as such. And on the other hand, if any portion or party in the North shall, in the discharge of their constitutional duty, come to our relief on this question, we are bound, not only on the principle of gratitude, but of self-preservation, to consider them as friends, and to unite with them as such. And, sir, I will take this occasion, to tender my sincere thanks, in the name of my State and of my constituents, to those from the non-slaveholding States who voted with us on this question—who took counsel of their duty rather than of their fears.

The course of Northern gentlemen who have acted with us on this matter, presents an instance of high moral sublimity—of noble self-sacrificing devotion. They had every thing to lose and nothing to gain at home, and yet, in discharge of a constitutional obligation, they have come to the relief of the unoffending South.

MR. SPEAKER, let it be recollected, we of the South did not commence this controversy. We wish no excitement on this subject: all we ask, is to be let alone. We wished to proceed to business under the rules of the last Congress, till new ones can be reported; but the gentleman from Massachusetts, (Mr. ADAMS,) and those who sustain him, objected to this; they refuse to move one step; they refuse to organize this House, till they have triumphed over the feelings of southern men; and when we complain, they turn upon us with scorn and insult, and accuse us of agitation—agitation. We know our position here. Although we are but defending ourselves, yet we are taunted with creating excitement. I call upon this House, and this country to witness, that we of the South are not responsible for the consumption of time, and excitement of feeling growing out of this discussion. *We know* that we came here for a different purpose. *We know* that we came here for the purpose of trying to heal the sufferings, and to relieve the currency and finances, of the nation. The very men who taunt us with this delay, are the ones, who suffer themselves to be diverted from the great purposes for which we assembled—who neglect the important interests of the country—merely for the purpose of pandering, to the prejudice and bigotry of those whose very element is mischief, and the success of whose schemes must inevitably result in disunion.

This 21st rule was not originally passed for the purpose of enabling the South to oppress the North, as contended by the gentleman from Massachusetts, in the fury of his temper and the wildness of his imagination; but it was passed for the purpose of defending the South, against the unjust aggressions and hypocritical philanthropy of a band of fanatics at the North, who are urged on and instigated by a few political discontents, who hate us and our institutions on account of some political pique. The gentleman from Massachusetts said the object of southern gentlemen, in voting for this rule, was to screen themselves from the charge of abolitionism at home. Is this all the charity that gentleman has learnt in a life of near fifty years of public service? What right has he to impugn the motives of others? Who made him a judge of the *hearts* of men? By what authority does he condemn the motives of men, who act under the same responsibility to God and their country, that he does? It is as illiberal and unkind in him to make the charge

he does, as it would be in me to say, that his motives, in pursuing the course he does, is to create an insurrection among the slaves at the South.

The gentleman from Massachusetts says, the reason why we are not willing to listen to the prayers of the abolitionists is, that "conscience makes cowards of us." Which is the most cowardly, to defend our rights on our own soil, or to take advantage of our *position*, to assail with impunity the rights of others? According to the code, which prevails in this land of "cowards," as the gentleman would call us, it is considered the greatest evidence of cowardice, for any one to take advantage of age or station, to cast his insults and denunciations upon his unoffending neighbors. "Cowards" as we may be, we have magnanimity enough, to spare those who are shielded by their irresponsibility.

We of the South, I repeat, are not responsible for this discussion, and the excitement growing out of it: we were content with the rule of the last session; we were opposed to agitating the subject. But, sir, if the issue must be made, if the war must come, we are ready to meet you—if you will come out, and take your position in a fair field. Don't send your missiles from your secret retreats, but come out boldly, and we are ready to meet you, first in argument, and after that is exhausted, we know by what we are to stand. Gentlemen may call this mere declamation—idle gasconade; I have no doubt they will; that is the usual answer that right and justice usually receive, from the cold heartless voice of arrogance and oppression. But no, sir, we warn you now to let us alone, to leave us unmolested in the enjoyment of our undoubted rights.

If you are resolved to force this issue upon us, I repeat again, I for one am ready to meet it. There are others here who are ready to meet it—others, whose voices have so often been raised in support of constitutional right—who have not quailed before oppression at home, and who are not likely to yield to it from abroad. I was pleased at the gallant manner, in which the gentleman from Maryland, (Mr. JOHNSON)—the gentleman from Virginia, (Mr. WISE,) and the gentleman from Georgia, (Mr. KING,) met this question at the very threshhold. They have given warning, that they are ready to meet the enemies of our institutions, on the ramparts. There are others here, who are ready to stand by them. We have taken our position. We stand on the defensive. We plant ourselves on the platform of the Constitution. We ask for nothing, but the enjoyment of those constitutional rights and privileges, guaranteed to us by the fathers of the republic. From this position we will not be driven. Gentlemen are mistaken, if they suppose they are to crush us, and trample on our rights, by mere brute force—by a mere majority of numbers in this hall. Those who are congratulating themselves, with the idea of having defeated us, will yet find, that the "race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." They will yet find, that there is a moral power in being in the right, which will defy all their assaults. *Men*, yes, *men* who know their rights, are not to be deterred from the exercise of those rights, by a band of fanatics, who are attempting to wield a rod of terror over this hall, and who, I am sorry to say, *do* exercise an influence here, incompatible with the dignity of this House, and the character of this country. It is not because we fear the assaults of this seditious clan—it is not that we doubt our ability to protect ourselves against all their machinations—that we are opposed to the reception of their abusive memorials; but, sir, it is because we don't choose—no sir, we don't *choose* to be annoyed by this insolent interference with our concerns—and because we believe further, that it is calculated to sow the seeds of dissension and of disunion throughout the land.

The gentleman from Massachusetts remarked that these incendiaries were

actuated by the same principle, as that depicted in the armorial bearings of the State of Virginia—which is a beautiful woman trampling on the neck of a tyrant, with the motto, *Sic semper tyrrannis*. Yes, sir, and as long as Virginia remains true to that motto, she will deluge her borders in blood, sooner than suffer her rights and privileges thus ruthlessly to be invaded. Sir, what is tyranny? It is an unjust and unlawful interference, with the rights of others. Why was George III. denominated a “tyrant” in the Declaration of Independence? It was because he dared to infringe upon the rights of the colonies—rights which were guaranteed to the subjects of the British crown, by the usages of ages, and the laws of the realm. And whenever you of the North, attempt to encroach upon the constitutional privileges of us of the South, we shall regard you as attempting to play the part of tyrants, and we will treat you as such. We oppose to your assaults, that same motto of the Virginia arms—*Sic semper tyrrannis*. And whenever you attempt to rob us of our rights, you will find—not a beautiful woman, for we do not call upon women to fight our battles, as your incendiaries do, but—men, yes, men, with stout hearts and strong arms, trampling you under our feet, and your crown and sceptre trailing in the dust.

The gentleman from Massachusetts took the daring ground, that although this Government might not disturb, in the first instance, the institution of slavery in the States of this Union, yet, it might interpose as the treaty-making power, in case of a servile insurrection, even to the extent of universal emancipation. This is the boldest ground I have ever heard assumed, even by the most ultra abolitionists. Is such language as this, to be proclaimed on this floor, and to be passed over without notice—especially, when we consider the high source whence it comes? And are we to be charged with creating “agitation,” when we rise to protest against it? When such language is used here, “I will speak, though hell itself should gape, and bid me hold my peace.” Interpose as the treaty-making power! Between whom? Between the slaves and their masters? Does the gentleman from Massachusetts pretend to say, that, in case of a servile insurrection, the slaves would maintain the position of an independent belligerent power? How can this be, when slaves are recognised as property, in the Constitution—virtually property, as much so, as are our lands, and the stock that grazes them? How can this Government constitutionally interfere, for the purpose of securing political privileges to our slaves, when they are not recognised as citizens in that instrument, or as entitled to any political rights whatever? Does he not see to what an absurdity this argument would lead him? Suppose the agrarian mobs in your Northern cities were to rise in commotion, and attempt to appropriate to themselves the property of the wealthy, and the proceeds of the honest man’s industry. Suppose they were to bid defiance to the laws—provetoo strong for the civil power—and threaten to overthrow the authority of the local government, against which they might be in arms. Will it be pretended, that this Government might interpose in such case, as the treaty-making power, to the extent of satisfying the inordinate demands of these insurrectionists, by securing to them the property, which they had taken by violence? Such argument is based upon the supposition, that the Constitution provides for enforcing a violation of its express provisions.

Mr. Speaker, the scene exhibited in this House for the last few days, must be humiliating to every high minded American citizen, not only on account of the evil consequences likely to result from it, but on account of the spectacle afforded by the gentleman from Massachusetts, (Mr. ADAMS.) Here is a man, who has filled the highest office in this land of freedom, applying the fire-brand to the very fabric, which was, in a great part, reared by his venerated father. Here is a man, over whose head has passed seventy summers, who—

instead of exhibiting the sober discretion, and calm philosophy of age—is indulging in gusts of passion, unbecoming the ardour of youth; and scattering his denunciations with an unsparing hand, against the very men, many of whom fell, as political martyrs, for their devotion to his cause. Here is a man, who, instead of attempting to uphold the institutions, over which he once presided—instead of trying to cement that union, without which liberty itself is an abstraction—has unfurled the blood-red flag of insurrection, and has invited the slave to obliterate the brand of his servitude, with his master's blood. He has virtually said to our slaves—and his declaration has gone abroad on the wings of the wind—if you wish the interposition of this Government, you must first raise the standard of revolt. He has virtually said to them, commence the work of rapine and murder, spread desolation and dismay throughout your land, apply to us with your hands reeking with slaughter—we can then interpose, and for the purpose of restoring peace, we will come in as the treaty-making power, and will stipulate for your “universal emancipation.” If the spirits of the departed were allowed to revisit this world, such language would have been sufficient to exorcise from their graves, the ghosts of our revolutionary fathers, and cause them to stalk in gloomy consternation, through this hall. But sir, they are gone, gone to enjoy the rewards of the faithful, and with them, the virtue and patriotism of their names seem to have departed. But that I know any advice I might give the gentleman from Massachusetts, would be treated with sullen contempt, I would advise him to curb his unruly temper. I would suggest to him, that all the learning of the schools, all the experience of years, all the honors of station—in the absence of temper and discretion, without a due exercise of charity for the opinions and feelings of others—are but “as sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal.” I would advise him to read again, a poem which I presume he has often read, but by which he seems never to have profited. I mean Haley’s “Triumphs of Temper,” and especially these four last lines—

“Virtue’s an ingot of Peruvian gold,  
Sense the bright ore Potosí’s mines unfold,  
But *temper*’s image must their pow’r create,  
And stamp these precious metals with sterling weight.”

Mr. Speaker, I would make an appeal to our Northern brethren here, but that I know, the complaints of the injured are always treated with scorn, by the oppressor. I would appeal to them, in the name of justice, not to attempt to rob us of our acknowledged rights. I would appeal to them, in the name of Christian benevolence, to cease this warfare against their own brethren, the descendants of a common ancestry, the participators in one common inheritance of freedom. I would appeal to them, by the expended blood and treasure of our fathers—by the examples which they set us, and the precepts which they taught us—not to destroy by faction, the work of their common hands. I would appeal to them in the name of the Constitution, not to overleap those barriers, which the sages of the past erected around the rights of the States. Above all, sir, I would appeal to them in the name of this glorious Union, without which I cannot contemplate liberty except as an ideality—which is the terror of tyrants, and which is identified with the hopes of freedom throughout the world—which imparts to the star-spangled banner its glory, and to the American citizen, his port of noble bearing in every land—which is fast sending the blessings of free government, of civilization, and of the Christian faith, through the trackless forests that stretch towards the shores of the Pacific—by this Union I would appeal to them, to arrest the progress of faction, before it shall be too late; to stop the march of fanaticism, before it shall have undermined the very foundations of our political fabric. Sir, we are apt to undervalue those blessings, to which we have been accustomed

from childhood, and whose deprivation we have never felt. We never know the value of health, till we are prostrated by sickness—we never appreciate the blessing of friendship, till we are deprived of its aid—or as the poet beautifully expresses it—

How blessings brighten, as they take their flight.

And so it is, with this happy Union. We never shall know how to estimate its value, until it shall be severed by discord and faction. We of the South love this Union, because it secures to us our liberties; but we shall hate it in turn, when it is converted into an engine of tyranny. And when the cloud of civil commotion shall lower over our political horizon, and strife and dissension shall stalk through the land—when the pillars of this fair fabric of freedom shall begin to crumble, and the citadel of our national glory is toppling into ruin—when brothers' hands shall reek with brothers' slaughter, and the sun of our liberty shall go down in blood—then, and not till then, shall we appreciate the blessings of this Union, which a reckless fanaticism is now shaking to its centre.











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